



## DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### M E M O R A N D U M

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DATE: August 29, 2008

TO: Ray Giometti, Planning Commission Chair  
Members of the Planning Commission

FROM: Erika Conkling, AICP, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: **CPA #2008-T-02 Community Planning Amendments**

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#### DESCRIPTION

This amendment proposes to make changes to the Comprehensive Plan in two different ways. First is to add a Community Planning element with goals, objectives, and policies to guide the development of Community Plans. Second is to streamline the Land Use element and to consolidate policies by topic instead of by land use designation.

#### ISSUE SUMMARY

1. What goals, objectives, and policies are needed to guide the Community Planning Initiative?
2. How should the Comprehensive Plan, especially the Land Use element, be re-written to become more user-friendly in anticipation of Community Planning?

#### ANALYSIS

As part of the Business Plan Goals 2008-2013, the City Council sets goals to “promote neighborhood revitalization,” and to “manage growth through sound urban planning.” In order to fulfill these goals, the City anticipates beginning a Community Planning Initiative beginning in 2009. The purpose of this initiative is to give communities greater control over how the Comprehensive Plan is implemented, to preserve and establish community identity, and to participate in local governmental decision making on issues that affect quality of life.

Implementation of the Community Planning Initiative will take several years and involve generating nine Community Plans. Once the Community Plans are completed, every area of the City and the Potential Annexation Area will be included in a Community Plan. This is a new way of approaching planning in Renton. Thus, it is appropriate that there are goals, objectives and policies to guide the Community Planning effort.

At this time, the proposed Community Planning Element (see Attachment A) will focus on processes and procedures for Community Planning. These policies focus on how

Community Planning will happen, who will be involved, why Community Planning is important, where the Community Planning Sub-areas are located, and how the Plans will be integrated into the Comprehensive Plan and coordinated with the development regulations. This establishes a firm basis for the Community Planning Initiative and instructs the City and the communities in how to proceed.

Additionally, the new Community Planning Element should be supported in other areas of the Comprehensive Plan by adding short sections about it to both the Introduction and the Vision Element of the Plan. The section added to the Introduction, would replace the current section on Sub-area Plans and Neighborhoods, as follows:

### **~~Sub-Area Plans and Neighborhoods~~**

~~The Comprehensive Plan is a citywide document that provides policy guidance based on specified issues, topics, and land use designations. The many neighborhoods within the City are not differentiated except for the South Renton portion of the Urban Center Downtown. The Plan includes a sub-area plan for the South Renton area, adopted by the City Council in 2002. A sub-area plan for the Highlands area is currently under development with adoption anticipated in 2006. The Cedar River Corridor sub-area is prioritized for consideration of a sub-area plan in the 2006 work program. The sub-area plans provide a focused vision for the geographical area, additional policy direction on land use, capital improvements including transportation, and utilities. They also include prototypical redevelopment and concepts for housing and street improvements.~~

### **Community Planning**

The Comprehensive Plan is a citywide document that provides policy guidance for the growth and the development of the City as a whole based on a community vision. Beginning in 2009, the City will begin to work on a series of Community Plans that establish a vision for each geographical sub-area within the City. The goal is to include all of the neighborhoods of the City in a Community Plan within six years. Community planning will involve residents, businesses, and other stakeholders with a goal of developing a policy document to provide focused direction on topics such as growth, land use, capital improvements, urban design, and quality of life. Each plan will be unique to the community that creates it, and will be updated every six years to reflect the changing needs of the neighborhood.

Similarly, a new section would be added to the Vision Element to include the rationale for how the Community Planning effort helps to implement the City's vision, which is based upon the Business Plan Goals, Vision, and Mission. The proposed text reads as follows:

Starting in 2009, the City will initiate a Community Planning process, where each area of the City will be divided geographically into

Community Planning Areas. Residents, businesses, and stakeholders will develop a vision that defines their community and forms the basis for a set of policies that address issues of growth, quality of life, design, and capital improvements. Community Plans will be an extension of the Comprehensive Plan, and a realization of the Vision, Mission, and Goals of the Council's Business Plan.

Another way that Community Planning can be supported is through a re-formatting of the Land Use element. This would support Community Planning by streamlining the Comprehensive Plan and making it more user-friendly. Part of the purpose of a Comprehensive Plan is to provide a set of policies that guide the City in making decisions about growth, development proposals, and capital improvements. The underlying goal of this part of the proposed amendment is to provide a clearer set of instructions to the City and to communities engaging in Community Planning. As a result, the following changes are proposed to the residential, centers, commercial, and employment area subsections of the Land Use element:

1. Remove policies regarding design, environment, transportation, transit, pedestrian circulation, and economics to the appropriate element of the Comprehensive Plan (Community Design, Environmental, Transportation, and Economic Development)
2. Consider consolidating policies on related topics into new, topic-based, sections within the Land Use element
3. For each land use designation include policies on purpose, mapping, zoning, and development regulations

The intent of these changes is not to result in policy changes, but just to re-organize the policies to make them easier to understand and implement.

Currently, the Land Use element is organized in two different ways. There are a series of policies on topical issues: regional growth policies, airport compatible land use policies, annexations, historical and archaeological resources, non-conforming uses, public facilities, and resource land. There are a second series of policies specific to land use designations, grouped in four categories: residential, centers, commercial, and employment areas. This organization can be confusing and provides a fair amount of redundancy in the Comprehensive Plan. Within each land use designation a variety of different policies that address issues of: mapping criteria, zoning options, the circulation of pedestrians and automobiles, signs, design, purpose, infill, transit development, districts, environmental protection, and gateways. Some policies are duplicated across land use designations and some duplicate policies in other elements of the Comprehensive Plan. Moving these policies to the appropriate sections by topic might make it easier to find and implement them.

Once such policies were moved elsewhere, it would leave a set of policies regarding the designation's purpose, mapping criteria, zoning criteria, and application of development regulations for each land use designation. These policies would read like a set of instructions to the City and the community on how to apply land use and zoning. Clear,

concise instructions on how to implement each of the Comprehensive Plan land use designations will be an important tool for communities making decisions about density and land use as part of the Community Planning process.

## **REVIEW CRITERIA**

According to RMC 4-9-020G, proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendments must meet at least one of the following review criteria:

1. *The request supports the vision embodied in the Comprehensive Plan, or*
2. *The request supports the adopted business plan goals established by the City Council, or*
3. *The request eliminates conflict with existing elements or policies, or*
4. *The request amends the Comprehensive Plan to accommodate new policy directives of the City Council.*

Adding a new Community Planning element directly supports the implementation of the Business Plan goals to “promote neighborhood revitalization” and to “manage growth through sound planning,” since the purpose of the Community Planning initiative is to provide communities within Renton the opportunity to implement the Comprehensive Plan in a way that supports local identity and local autonomy. For the same reason it supports the Vision embodied in the Comprehensive Plan. Re-formatting the land use element and redistributing policies based on topics is not strictly a change in policy, but makes the Comprehensive Plan more user-friendly. The goal is to consolidate policies on similar topics so they are easier to find, understand, and implement. This prevents interpretive errors that lead to inconsistency and conflict between sections of the Comprehensive Plan.

## **CONCLUSION**

The proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan will both make the plan a stronger, more user-friendly document, which is easier to implement, and will provide policy direction for implementing Community Planning.

### **Community Planning Element**

**Goal:** Engage in community planning to improve the livability of Renton's neighborhoods, to preserve unique identity and create community character, and to provide the public with the opportunity to participate in shaping the future of their community.

**Purpose:** The Community Planning element envisions a local voice in how the Comprehensive Plan and its development regulations will be carried out in different geographical areas of the City. Community Plans will exemplify how the objectives and policies of the Comprehensive Plan play out when applied to detailed and specific conditions. They will indicate specific land use designations, appropriate densities, and the design standards that should apply in individual Community Planning Sub-areas. Preserving and building community character while ensuring an efficient and predictable development approval process is a central theme.

Community Planning results from a partnership between the City and the businesses, residents, and other stakeholders of a Community Planning Sub-area. They address local issues that are not in a general Comprehensive Plan. Patterns of land use, design, traffic circulation, and services expressed within the Community Plan for the benefit of the social, economic, physical health, safety, and welfare of the people in the community. Community Plans are a unifying force that identifies local characteristics in the community by surveying population, employment, transportation, building, and social attributes. Through the Community Planning process, communities will decide what they want to nurture and what they want to change at the local level.

The purpose of Community Planning is to enhance community values and identify and assure sensible growth and development. One situation that must be avoided is that community plans may be pushed to freeze existing conditions, possibly to frustrate or evade provisions of the Comprehensive Plan that some members of the community may not like. That would have the effect of shifting development pressures and responsibilities outside community boundaries. Community Plans must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Washington State Growth Management Act. Plans should carry preambles with clearly articulated statements of purpose and should contain goals, policies and principles that benefit both the local community and the City of Renton as a whole.

**Objective CP-A.** Foster the abilities of communities to implement the Comprehensive Plan within the Community Planning sub-areas of the City of Renton.

**Policy CP-1.** Community Plans will apply Comprehensive Plan policies to specific parcels and groups of parcels within the Community Planning sub-areas.

**Policy CP-2.** Community Plans will implement the Comprehensive Plan by identifying community design characteristics which are used in project review (special district review, site plan review, conditional use permits, etc.)

**Policy CP-3.** Community Planning will occur in coordination with existing recognized neighborhood associations, business associations, and other community groups to make recommendations on land use designations, design standards, capital improvements, and development proposals within the Community Planning sub-areas using the policies of the Comprehensive Plan and Title IV development regulations.

**Policy CP-4.** The City will utilize an effective communication system that keeps people in Community Planning Sub-areas informed at the beginning, as well as during, the process of creating a Community Plan. After plans are adopted, the City will continue to communicate with the people of Community Planning areas regarding proposed developments and policy decisions that may affect their Community Plan or Community Planning sub-area.

**Objective CP-B.** Foster community character and preserve the unique identities of neighborhoods and Community Planning sub-areas.

**Policy CP-5.** Community Plan shall involve the people of the community in plan development and amendment.

**Policy CP-6.** Community Plans shall articulate a vision for the community.

**Policy CP-7.** Community Plans shall identify features and characteristics of communities to be retained, developed, preserved, enhanced, or corrected.

**Policy CP-8.** Community Plans shall consider areas for commercial, industrial, residential, capital facilities, recreation, and other land uses, using the density ranges and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

**Policy CP-9.** Community Plans shall contain policies that supplement and refine the goals, objectives, and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

**Policy CP-10.** Community Plans may identify design features to be encouraged in capital facilities, multi-family residential development, commercial and industrial areas, and in landscaping. Design features may include site planning, building design, and other features which affect the character of the community.

**Policy CP-11.** Community Plans shall use the Comprehensive Plan policies written to achieve environmental protection, create open space, provide affordable housing, and accomplish other Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives.

**Objective CP-C.** Support communities in the development of new community plans and in the update of existing community plans.

**Policy CP-12.** Community Planning sub-areas are defined by the *Community Planning Sub-Area* Map within the Community Planning element of the Comprehensive Plan.

**Policy CP-13.** Community Plans will be initiated by the Mayor, City Council, or Planning Commission in order to implement objectives, principles, and standards of the Comprehensive Plan.

**Policy CP-14.** Communities can request the initiation of Community Plan by submitting a petition to the Mayor and City Council that identifies the reasons why a Community Plan is needed, such as: the need to preserve historical areas, the identification of new community problems, or a change in local conditions.

**Policy CP-15.** The Community Planning process will be initiated based on the following priorities: public health, safety, or welfare; previous commitments by the City to prepare a Community or Sub-Area plan; and evidence of community support.

**Policy CP-16.** Community Plans shall focus on policy choices and regulatory options that can be effectively implemented and shown to be beneficial and desirable for the community.

**Policy CP-17.** During the Community Planning process innovative and updated information should be shared with the Planning Commission and the Planning and Development Committee of the City Council to determine if there is a need or desire for changes City-wide.

**Policy CP-18.** Communities will be offered the opportunity to update their Community Plans at least every six years.

**Objective CP-D.** Ensure consistency between Community Plans, development regulations, and the Comprehensive Plan.

**Policy CP-19.** Establish a process for resolving land use conflicts within communities, and with the Comprehensive Plan, that includes the participation of all stakeholders in coming up with a solution.

**Policy CP-20.** Community Plan policies and development regulations should be applied City-wide when beneficial and desirable for all Community Planning Sub-areas and when implementation would allow greater consistency between Community Planning Sub-areas.

**Policy CP-21.** Community Plans should use existing Comprehensive Plan Land Use designations rather than creating new designations. New designations should only be created when existing designations cannot be implemented through a zone classification or variety of zone classifications to meet the same intent.

**Policy CP-22.** Implement Community Plans through land use regulations and administrative decisions where possible, and through capital facilities provisions and other public programs, as applicable.

**Policy CP-23.** One set of development regulations shall apply City-wide.

**Policy CP-24.** City development regulations shall provide a range of alternatives that recognizes and provides for local uniqueness and character. Communities may select from the range of alternatives to achieve their desired character.

**Policy CP-25.** Community Plans should use existing zone classifications rather than creating new zone classifications. Densities and uses may vary among Community Planning Sub-areas only when consistent with City-wide policies for growth and land use.

**Policy CP-26.** Communities may recommend changes to the development regulations to achieve the desired character as articulated in an adopted Community Plan. Proposed new regulations should be applied to similar situated locations in other parts of the City when possible.

**Policy CP-27.** Redundant and inconsistent regulations, procedures, and overlays should be eliminated in Community Plan Sub-areas.

**Policy CP-28.** Use Community Plan policies as guidelines for identifying mitigation and unacceptable impacts for projects and development proposals.